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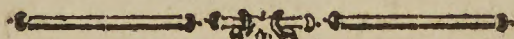
A C C O U N T

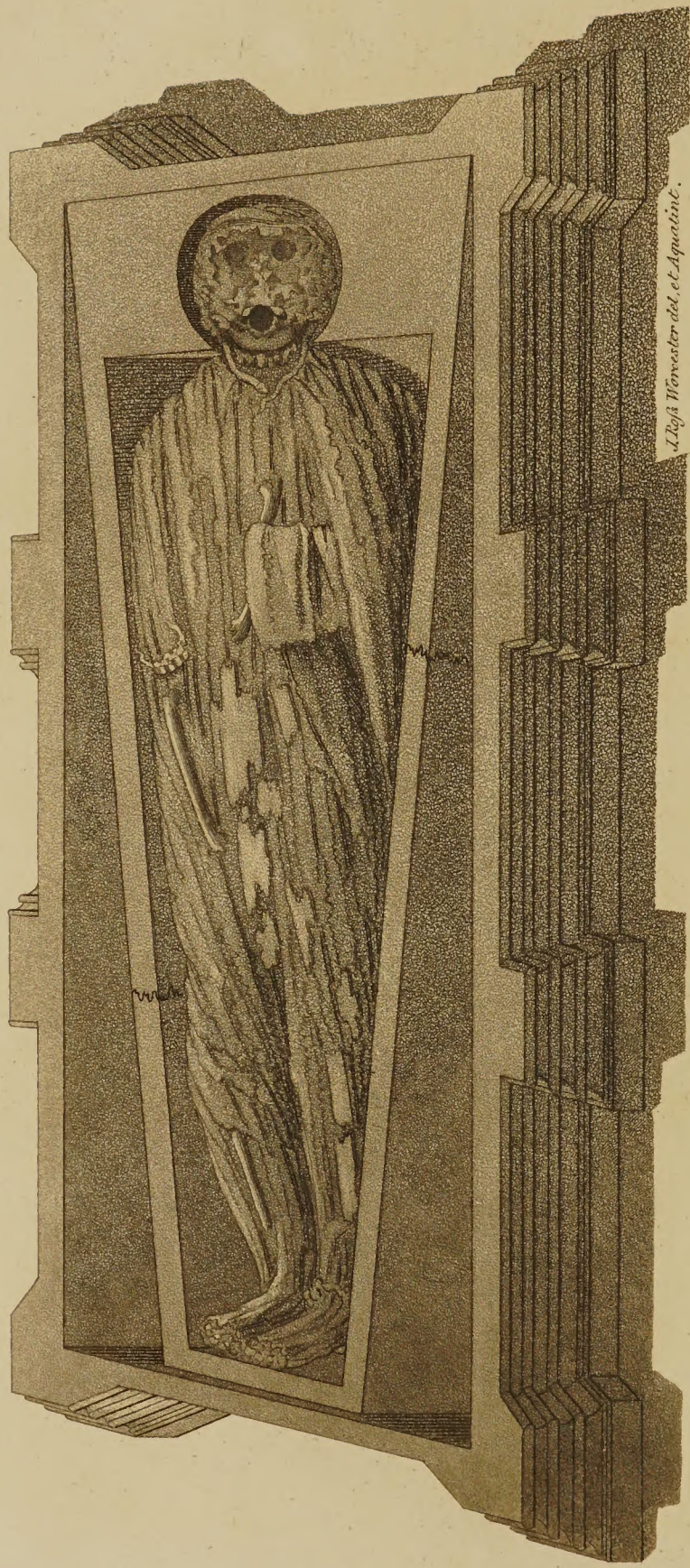
O F T H E

D I S C O V E R Y O F T H E B O D Y

O F

K I N G J O H N .





The body of King John, as it appeared on opening his tomb in Worcester Cathedral, Monday July 17. 1797.
The body 5. 6½ long.

Published July 24th 1797, by James Roß Engraver, Worcester, T. and R. Green. N^o 4 Percy Street, & F. Jukes N^o 10 Howland Street London.

AN
A C C O U N T
OF THE
DISCOVERY OF THE BODY
OF
KING JOHN,
IN THE
CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF WORCESTER,
JULY 17th, 1797,

FROM AUTHENTIC COMMUNICATIONS ; WITH ILLUSTRATIONS AND REMARKS

By VALENTINE GREEN, F. S. A.

AUTHOR OF THE HISTORY AND ANTIQUITIES OF THE CITY
AND SUBURBS OF WORCESTER.

L O N D O N :

PUBLISHED BY V. AND R. GREEN, PERCY STREET, BEDFORD SQUARE ; AND F. JUKES,
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1797.

A N
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Among the various circumstances which eventually produced the discovery of the body of King John to have been deposited in the tomb in the choir of the cathedral church of Worcester, the following, as the most prominent, are conceived necessary to be stated.

In the course of my researches into the History of that Cathedral, and a minute examination of its fabric and monumental remains, for the purpose of forming a part of my new edition of "the History and Antiquities of the City and Suburbs of Worcester" published in two volumes, quarto, 1796, I was led to adopt the opinions of the most eminent and learned of our antiquaries who appeared to have joined in a conclusion, that although the original interment of King John had taken place in the Lady's chapel of that cathedral between the sepulchres of the Saints Oswald and Wulstan, before the altar of the blessed Virgin, yet that the effigy of the king, at the time of the reformation was removed from his grave, and laid upon the tomb which had been newly erected in the choir to receive it, and that this was done without removing the body, which was conjectured to have been left in its original state of sepulture in the Lady's chapel.

These conclusions deduced from the accounts and authorities of Leland, Abingdon, Dr. Stukely, Brown Willis, Mr. Garbet, Mr. Gough, Dr. Nash, and others, had been opposed by Dr. Thomas, and Mr. Dougharty;* the first affirming the interment of King John to have been in the choir, in the place on which the tomb now stands; and the last that the royal body remained within the tomb. After

* See Vol. I. Sect. IV. p. 68, and Sect. VII. p. 156, Hist. and Antiq. of Worcester.

weighing those opposite opinions with the most scrupulous attention, and proving by actual measurement the assertion of Dr. Thomas "that graves could be made there" to be erroneous;* and that Mr. Dougharty had asserted that which it would seem he had not actually examined; and also that what he advanced was invalidated by another respectable authority, which states from what must have been imagined the result of careful inspection, "that no bones were found in the sepulchre."

Thus warranted by ancient and modern testimony, and strongly fortified by personal investigation; together with a modern altar tomb before me of the precise form and stile of embellishment of that of Prince Arthur in the adjacent chapel, and probably the work of the same artists, it was felt that without better proof to the contrary, it would have been a presumption favouring too much of pertinacity, to have asserted that the remains of King John were first deposited there, or that any other sign of him was to be expected out of his grave in the Virgin's chapel, than the effigy of his person cumbent on the cenotaph in the choir.

The principle of those opinions had been adopted by me so early as 1764, and then made public in the first edition of the Survey of Worcester, (see p. 40) and in 1788 personally discussed with the Honourable and Reverend Dr. St. Andrew St. John, late Dean of Worcester, who was induced from what then passed on the subject, to adopt the resolution of opening the tomb to ascertain the fact; but his death which happened previous to the publication of the second edition of the History of Worcester, preventing the intended search, those conjectures, with much auxiliary and concurrent support, were again avowed, and have again been published.

In the present revised and enlarged form those conjectures are now presented, they have fallen under the notice of the Reverend Dr. Arthur Onslow, the present worthy Dean of Worcester, to whom, in a conversation on the general repair of the interior of the cathedral, which his judicious taste had already planned for the improvement and beautifying of it, I again ventured to suggest the opening of the royal tomb; and if, upon examination, no vestige of sepulture should appear, its removal from thence to the Lady's chapel, and there erecting it over the ancient grave in which King John's remains were supposed to lie, would be a measure fully sanctioned by propriety in respect of its appropriate designation, and in which portion of the cathedral it would also prove a befitting and dignifying object. As a measure of expediency, its removal had long been the wish of many,

* This has been confirmed by the late discovery. The stone coffin in which King John's remains are contained is laid *upon*, and not buried *in* or *under* the pavement of the choir. The depth of ground between that flooring and the crowns of the arches of the crypt beneath it, being not more than twelve inches, would not possibly admit of an interment: and the royal tomb stands precisely upon the centre of the arch at the extreme east end of the crypt. See the Plan of the Cathedral, fig. A. Vol. I. Sect. VII. Hist. and Antiq. of Worcester.

thereby to restore the orderly conduct of the devotional services of the church, subjected to much annoyance by the present position of the tomb, especially in the approach to the altar.

The caprices of modern reformation having no share in the projected arrangement, much less the unnecessary and indecent disturbance of royal inhumation : useful accommodation and the attainment of decorous order suitable to the solemn ~~and~~ purposes of the place being the ultimate objects in view, on Monday the 17th of July 1797, the taking down of the tomb of King John was proceeded upon in the following order.

On the removal of the royal effigy, and the stone slab on which it had been laid, and which had been broken in two in some former operation about the tomb, the objects first presented to view within it, were two partition walls of brick, raised to assist in the support of the superincumbent covering and figure of the king, and to take an equal bearing of their weight with the side and end pannels of the tomb. The spaces between those walls, and between them and the ends of the tomb were filled up with the rubbish of bricks and mortar. On taking down the pannel at the head, and one on each side, and clearing out the rubbish, two strong elm boards originally joined by a batten nailed at each end of them, but which had dropped off and left the boards loose, were next discovered, and upon their removal, the stone coffin, of which they had formed the covering, containing the entire remains of King John became visible !

The Dean and Chapter being immediately convened, my friend Mr. James Ross was desired to attend for the purpose of making observations on the object, and to transmit them to me in London : from those remarks so communicated, and more especially from others made by Mr. Sandford, an eminent surgeon of Worcester, obligingly furnished at the same time, together with the annexed plate executed by Mr. Ross, from a drawing taken by him on the spot ; the following further particulars are extracted and presented.

THE BODY

was found to have been adjusted in the stone coffin precisely in the same form as the figure on the tomb. The skull, instead of being placed with the face in the usual situation, presented the foramen magnum, the opening through which the spinal marrow passes down the vertebræ, turned upwards. The lower part of the os frontis was so much perished, as to have become nearly of an even surface with the bottoms of the sockets of the eyes. The whole of the upper jaw was

displaced from the skull, and found near the right elbow : it contained four teeth in very good preservation, and free from caries, two of them were dentes molares, and two bicuspides. The lower jaw was also separated from the skull, the coronoid processes were very perfect, as well as the condyles : there were no teeth in this jaw. Some grey hairs were discernable under the covering of the head. The ulna of the left arm which had been folded on the body was found detached from it, and lying obliquely on the breast ; the ulna of the right arm lay nearly in its proper place, but the radius of neither arm, nor the bones of either hand were visible. Those of the ribs, pelvis, &c, were so much covered with dust, and the foldings of the decayed robe as not to be clearly distinguishable. Part of the tibia of the right leg, in nearly its proper position, was exposed. The knee of this limb appeared to have been contracted, not lying so straight down as the left : occasioned probably by other bones or fragments having fallen under it. The bones of the toes were in good preservation, more particularly those of the right foot, on two or three of which the nails were still visible. The rest of the bones, more especially of the lower extremities were nearly perfect, and on the whole, appeared to have lain as they might naturally have done in their quiescent progress through the various stages of decay and dissolution. Some large pieces of mortar were found on and below the abdomen ; and a vast quantity of the dry skins of maggots were dispersed over the body ; these are supposed to have been produced by some part of it having gone into putrefaction (a circumstance imagined sometimes to have happened notwithstanding the precaution of embalming)* previous to its removal, and the maggots having remained undisturbed, were upon the present discovery seen in such great numbers. Or, that some parts of the dress being of leather, they might have been produced by the natural putrefaction of that animal substance. The body measured five feet, six inches and a half.

THE DRESS

in which the body of the king was found appears also to have been similar to that in which his figure is represented on the tomb, excepting the gloves on its hands and the crown on its head, which on the skull in the coffin was found to be the celebrated monk's cowl, in which he is recorded to be buried, as a passport through the regions of purgatory. This sacred envelope appeared to have fitted the head very closely, and had been tied or buckled under the chin by straps, parts of

* The bowels and heart of King John were buried at Croxton Abbey, in Staffordshire ; the Abbat of which had been his Physician, and performed the operation of embalming him. See Holingshed, p. 606. M. Paris, p. 288.

which remained. The body was covered by a robe reaching from the neck nearly to the feet; it had some of its embroidery still remaining near the right knee. It was apparently of crimson damask, and of strong texture: its colour however was so totally discharged from the effect of time, that it is but conjecturally it can be said to have been of any, but what has now pervaded the whole object; namely, a dusky brown. The cuff of the left arm which had been laid on the breast remained. In that hand a sword, in a leather scabbard, had been placed as on the tomb, parts of which much decayed, were found at intervals down the left side of the body, and to the feet, as were also parts of the scabbard, but in a much more perfect state than those of the sword. The legs had on a sort of ornamented covering which was tied round at the ankles, and extended over the feet, where the toes were visible through its decayed parts, the string about the left ankle still remained. The upper part of those coverings could not be traced, and it is undecided whether they should be termed boots, or whether they were a part of the under dress similar to the modern pantaloons. It would have been fortunate had it been determined whether they were of leather, or of what sort of drapery.

THE COFFIN

is of the Higley stone of Worcestershire, white, and chissel-levelled, wholly dissimilar in its kind to either that of the foundation of the tomb, its pannels, covering, or figure of the king. Its shape is best exhibited in the annexed plate. A very considerable fracture runs through it in an oblique direction, one foot six inches from the left shoulder, to two feet nine inches from the right. The coffin is laid upon the pavement of the choir, without being let into it. Its original covering, is that stone out of which the effigy of the king is sculptured, and now lying on the tomb, the shape of which is exactly correspondent with that of the stone coffin, and its extreme dimensions strictly proportionate to its purpose.

MEASURES.

	Feet.	Inches.
Depth of the cavity of the stone coffin in which the body is contained	-	0 — 9
Ditto, of the circular part, containing the head	-	0 — 6 $\frac{1}{2}$
Ditto, of the outside of the coffin	-	1 —
Thickness of the sides, ends, and bottom	-	0 — 3

	Feet.	Inches.
Length, inside	5	7
Extreme length, outside	6	1
Breadth at the head	2	2
Breadth at the feet	1	0
Length of the original cover, or lid of the stone coffin	6	4
Breadth at the head	2	5
Breadth at the feet	1	2*

REMARKS AND ILLUSTRATIONS.

It hath already been said, that the foregoing discovery of the remains of King John, had resulted from the strong assumptions of conjecture, founded on the opinions of former antiquaries of established character, and supported by those of others of the present times; asserting that the original sepulture and interment of the royal body was in the Lady's chapel of this cathedral; nor has the least circumstance from the recent disclosure of it in the tomb in the choir, arisen to invalidate those opinions and conjectures.

To give farther support to the proofs already adduced, that the ancient graves of the canonized saints, Oswald and Wulfstan, are in the Lady's chapel, and that the body of the king first received interment between them, would amount only to a waste of words; to point out the similarity of the construction of this ancient series of royal and ecclesiastical sepulchres, may however be somewhat satisfactory to those who have never seen them, or their actual position.

Let then the reader form in his imagination the stone coffin, in which the remains of the king now repose, to be let into the floor of the Lady's chapel, between the figures of the two bishops already laid there, and so deep as to have its top level with the pavement; and let him also suppose the sculptured figure of the King, now lying on the tomb, placed on the coffin as its covering, and which would apparently seem laid on the floor, he will then have the entire ancient sepulchre of King John, as originally constructed in that chapel, fully before his "mind's eye."

Those of the two prelates are precisely of the same fashion, laid the same depth in the earth, and in nothing different but the sculptures and the kind of stone of which they are formed.†

* See Hist. and Antiq. of Worcester, Vol. I. Sect. IV, p. 68, Note.

† It is here necessary to observe, that the stone coffins of the two bishops are laid on the sites of the ancient graves of St. Oswald and St. Wulfstan; that to the south containing the remains of Bishop Sylvester, who per-

It is presumed from the abundant evidences apparent on the view of the royal body and its appendages, that they have unquestionably undergone a translation since the time of their original interment in this cathedral. The change in the position of the skull, the displacing of the jaws; the loss of the bones of the hands, and the radii of both arms; the mutilations of the sword and its scabbard, and the broken fragments of the mortar upon and below the abdomen; the large fracture, supposed to be entirely through the stone coffin, and lastly, the tomb itself of modern construction, paired indeed, but not matched with the ancient; form together a testimonial phalanx of evidence, much too strong to be resisted with a view to proving that the place in which the body is now found deposited, was that of its first burial. And thus, while a less dignified tenant may have been admitted to the possession of the royal grave, the king himself is proved literally to remain above ground, intombed indeed, but unburied.

In the course of this curious and interesting investigation, we have witnessed a no less curious result.—Speculative opinions, ~~to~~ which the researches into the transactions of past ages, must more or less subject the antiquarian and historian to enter into, having in this instance elevated into an assumed fact, an event of ancient date of which no record had been made in the archives of the cathedral, a reliance on those opinions, and a consequent resort being had to the only practical means of establishing or destroying them, that effectual ordeal is seen in its operation to have secured a valuable recompence to posterity, in the destruction it has wrought on ingenious speculation, founded on specious possibilities, out of the ruins of which hath been raised a positive truth, that has for ever closed the lips of conjecture, and happily placed an ancient fact, beyond the reach of future doubt.

Had the fugitive memorandum made by Mr. Dougharty, dated July the 24th, 1754, and inserted as a MS. note in p. 35, in his copy of Dr. Thomas's Survey of the Cathedral, and now in the possession of Sir Charles Trubshaw Withers, Knight,* been fortunately entered in its proper place, in the Archives of the

formed the ceremony of interring King John in this cathedral, and died himself 16 July, 1219, in the same year he had displaced the remains of St. Wulfstan from his grave, and put them in a new shrine, in which operation he sawed some of his bones in sunder with his own hands. The remains of St. Oswald had been first enshrined by Bishop Adulph his successor, A. D. 1002, and again by Bishop Wulfstan in 1089, at the opening of the present cathedral. The grave of St. Wulfstan to the north, which the author examined in 1796, is occupied by the stone coffin and remains of William de Blois, successor to Bishop Sylvester; he died August the 18th, 1238. See History and Antiquities of Worcester, Vol. I. Section IV. p. 73, 74; Section VII. p. 186, and plan of the Cathedral, Ref. 1, 2, 3. It appears therefore that the three coffins, of the fashion of that period, were all made and placed there in the course of only twenty three years. Other instances of the same mode of interment in the same sort of coffins occur in this cathedral, of which that of William de Harcourt, temp. King John, in the Dean's chapel, is one.

* See History and Antiquities of Worcester, Vol. I. Sect. IV. p. 70.

Dean and Chapter, it would then have borne the indubitable stamp of official authenticity upon the face of it, and could have been cited as such. It is however satisfactory that even in its present form, discovered by mere chance, its veracity hath been fully proved. But the description of the tomb having been opened at that period, being liable to more than a right reading from its ambiguity, and standing isolated from other support, became too suspicious for decided adoption, especially when it was to be opposed to such odds of direct contrary opinion, and thence it hath remained to the present time, like the prophecies of Cassandra, discredited but true.

It is much to be regretted that the impatience of the multitude to view the royal remains, so unexpectedly found, should have become so ungovernable, as to make it necessary to close up the object of their curiosity so precipitantly, as to render it extremely difficult to obtain that regular account of a discovery so truly interesting demanded. Under that disadvantage however, strict and minute truth is attached to each particular of the accounts communicated, with a faithfulness of description that must be approved; and the justice evidently rendered to the graphic representation of the object will amply demonstrate that it had the peculiar good fortune whilst visible, to have fallen under the most judicious and accurate observation.

On the evening of Tuesday the 18th of July, the day after it had been taken down, and the royal remains laid open to the view of some thousands of spectators, who crowded to the cathedral to see it, the tomb of King John was completely restored and finally closed.

F I N I S .